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UNCLAS ABUJA 001556

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: NO SPILLOVER FROM NIGER IN NORTHEASTERN NIGERIA'S BORNO STATE

REF: STATE 151281

¶1. Abuja economic officer and two U.S. Army Office of Defense Cooperation humanitarian-assistance personnel visited Maiduguri, the capital of Borno State in far northeastern Nigeria, on August 19 and 20, 2005. Officers observed no evidence of Nigerien refugees in Maiduguri; in Borno's Baga town, near Lake Chad; or as far west as Borno's Kukawa town, where the road became impassable.

¶2. The Borno State deputy governor unexpectedly canceled his August 19 meeting with embassy officers because of his scheduling difficulties. However, at a meeting on August 19, news-department officials at the Borno Radio Television (BRT) Corporation said they had no knowledge of Nigerien refugees crossing into Borno State. BRT television news that evening also made no mention of Nigerien refugees crossing into Nigeria.

¶3. On August 20, embassy officers met with Alhaji Mustapha Umar El-Kanemi, the shehu (roughly, "sultan") of Borno. The shehu said grain prices in Maiduguri were continuing to rise, but he attributed this increase to general inflation and not to drought in Niger. He also said he had no knowledge of Nigerien refugees in Borno State but cautioned that the situation possibly was worse along northwestern Nigeria's border with Niger.

¶4. Embassy officers found no local newspapers that might have reported local leaders' reaction to the humanitarian crisis in West Africa.

¶5. Embassy officers found that large portions of Borno State were green and well watered, with heavy rain occurring on August 19. Corn fields north and south of Maiduguri grew up to six feet tall, although stalks and ears of corn were thin.

¶6. Embassy Abuja remains alert to AF's interest in the humanitarian crisis in West Africa.

CAMPBELL